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ABSTRACT

Recognition of the school as a cultural phenomenon has implications for the way in which the new principal enters a fully operational school, defines a role, and attempts to exercise influence. This paper outlines a three-part general strategy whereby the new principal can become a participant in the ongoing negotiation of the school culture. First, the new principal must discover the culture of the school by learning how to read the competing sets of cognitions held by school participants. Second, through communication with school participants, the principal helps to shape the context and meanings that influence behavior. Third, the principal legitimizes meanings and reaffirms key values of the school culture. In the micropolitics of the school, the credibility of the new principal depends upon his or her capacity to manage the culture of the school. (Contains 45 references.) (LMI)

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Strategy For The New Principal: Negotiating The Culture Of The School

by Michael J. Harvey

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Strategy For The New Principal: Negotiating The Culture Of The School

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Abstract

The first year of the appointment of a newly promoted principal is a critical moment, not only for the career of a promising educator, but also for the continuity of school operations. Recognition of the school as a cultural phenomenon has implications for the way in which the new principal enters a fully operational school, defines a role, and attempts to exercise influence. Culture functions as a conservative force that anchors the thinking and the problem solving of school participants. Culture is the lens through which the actions of the new principal become understandable to other school participants. This paper outlines a general strategy whereby the new principal can become a participant in the on-going negotiation of the culture of the school. The negotiated order of the school consists of an historical accumulation of customized and perhaps contested meanings. Attention is given to aspects of the process whereby the new principal can locate and discover the culture of the school, participate in culture formation, and legitimize key values and practices. As an outsider, the new principal experiences difficulties in `reading' the culture of the school and in understanding how the participants see the future of the school. The development of a network of influence for the receipt and transmission of meanings is an important aspect of positioning for leadership. In the micropolitics of the school, the credibility of the new principal depends upon capacity to manage the culture of the school.

Strategy For The New Principal: Negotiating The Culture of The School

Introduction

The appointment of promising educators to their first principalship, or to a principalship in a school of greater complexity, is a demanding career transition. The status passage is a moment of risk to not only the career of the new principal but also to the stability and the continuity of the pattern of organization of the host school. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many new principals do not obtain a sense of professional satisfaction from their first year of appointment. Induction programs typically focus on 'information giving' about current education system priorities. There is usually little treatment of the strategy whereby the new principal will enter the school and establish a presence that has potential for educational leadership. Recognition of the school as a cultural phenomenon provides opportunities for understanding the experiences and the actions of new principals during the first year of appointment.

The massive research literature on school administration pays little attention to the entry of the newly promoted principal into a fully operational school. Like all principals, the new appointees are expected to provide clear directions for the educational program. They should provide educational leadership that generates commitment from school participants to school purposes and priorities. The appointee inherits the formal authority of the position of chief executive and must accept responsibility for all aspects of school operations. Typically the outgoing principal has initiated and sponsored the key practices and policies of the school of appointment. Although new principals are experienced educators, they enter the school as outsiders or 'aliens.' They lack awareness and understanding of the customized patterns of on-going school operations and the pre-existing social worlds of school participants. Under these circumstances, their entry to the school becomes problematic.

Since 1986, the new principal has become the focus of what is now an international research initiative. The new research views schools as cultures and is sensitive to `what new principals do' in the life-world of the school. A mix of observational, ethnographic, interview-based longitudinal case studies, action research, and survey methods is used in each project. A small number of significant studies have been undertaken, or are in progress. These are:

- The National Foundation for Educational Research study of 16 secondary heads during their first two years of appointment. (See Weindling and Early, 1987a, 1987b).

- The University of Waikato. Consultancy assisting new principals to explore the cultural and organizational linkages of the school. (See Wadsworth, 1987, 1988).

- The International Institute for Policy and Administrative Studies, Western Australian College of Advance Education. Case study of ten new principals during their first year of appointment. (See Harvey, 1988. Schwartz and Harvey, 1991).

- The Beginning Principals' Study at the University of Florida and the University of Colorado. Case studies of 12 beginning principals during their first year of appointment. (A large number of papers have resulted. See Parkay, Currie and Rhodes (1992). Roberts (1989) investigated the cultural orientations of the beginning principal).

- The Beginning Principals' Project at the University of New England. The 1989 cohort of beginning principals in the Department of Education of New South Wales (See Thomas, 1991).

Other case studies also focus on the accommodation of the new principal to the culture of the school (See Lloyd, 1986; Hart, 1991; O'Callaghan, 1990).

Valuable data and concepts have emerged from the research for the generation of grounded theories of school management and the design of professional development experiences for aspirants to the principalship. Each of these studies reveals aspects of the interactions of the new principal and the culture of the school. So far, the research literature provides insight into only some aspects of the interaction of the new principal and the culture of the school. A grounded theory of the way in which the new principal enters a fully operational school and attempts to exercise influence during the first year of appointment remains to be developed.

This paper proposes a strategy whereby the new principals can acquire potential to provide educational leadership through the process of on-going culture formation. The paper begins with a conceptualization of culture. A general strategy is then proposed to enable the new principals to make an accommodation to the culture of the school. The strategy is informed by critical theory and focuses on the way in which the new principals can change the culture of the school so as to improve the teaching-learning process. The three components of the general strategy are then used as organizing centers for the paper. The focus is on the identification of some of the strategic thinking that is required of new principals who attempt to provide

leadership that is grounded in the culture of the school. Resolution of these issues is central to the way in which the new principal enters the school and progressively defines a role while attempting to influence school operations. The strategic issues are identified from a re-analysis of a recent multiple case study of ten primary, district high and secondary principals who took up appointment during 1987 in state schools in Western Australia (See Harvey, 1988). Findings from the other research relating to new principals is used to supplement the analysis. Recommendations emerge from each

A Concept of Culture

Challenge to the once dominant scientific management paradigm of administration using interpretive, conflict, and critical constructivist paradigms has provided new frameworks for investigation of the experiences and decision-making strategies of school administrators. These emergent paradigms enable conceptualization of schools as being constructed from human action rather than existing as immutable or reified structures (Greenfield, 1985). Human intention, will, experience, and values guide action. According to this view, schools are cultural rather than structural phenomena. School participants exercise discretionary power as they respond to organizational arrangements.

The culture of the school derives from the way in which the participants define situations and construct social reality. The culture of the school emerges from the on-going social interaction of the participants. Through communication in what has been termed a speech community (Brand, 1990) or a system of symbolic discourse (Smircich, 1983), participants negotiate shared meanings. The works of Schein (1985), Corbett, Firestone, and Wilson (1987) and Lundberg (1988) can be used to identify the characteristics of the culture of the school. Collectively shared meanings:

- are manifested in observables such as language, behavior, symbols, as well as in the perspectives of participants;

- contain values, beliefs, and assumptions relating to 'effective' teaching, and 'effective' school organization. The core values underpin many aspects of life in school, often in 'invisible' ways;

- are known to a significant proportion of school participants, i.e. public not private;

- contain an historical residue of problem-solving strategies that relate to the central activities of life at school;

- represent a mosaic that may contain contradictions;

- are socially learned by members, including new members, as the correct way to think, perceive, feel and act;

- become a common frame of reference for thinking and drop from the consciousness of school participants. Culture becomes taken-for-granted;

- are unique to a particular school and serve to provide purpose, direction and mission;

- serve to reduce the anxiety of participants. The shared meanings provide a source of emotional security. Culture is a conservative phenomenon and may contain `sacred' elements; and

- are subject to change as participants experience new problems or as new knowledge permeates the school. Culture formation is on-going.

The shared meanings represent a significant component of the professional knowledge of school participants, and serve either to limit or enhance the quality of education. Recognition of culture has important implications for the role of the principal. It becomes the responsibility of the principal to ensure that the culture of the school focuses the energies of school staff on a teaching-learning process that meets the needs of students.

Research using interpretive and the socially critical paradigms shows that the use of power, conflict, and resistance are endemic in school organizations. Culture formation is embedded in micro-political processes (Hoyle, 1986; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1992). Individuals and groups with different values, beliefs, and assumptions compete to have their interests incorporated in policies and practices, which contribute to the culture of the school. Free consciousness is restricted if social relationships are characterized by dominance and subordination (Foster, 1986; Sirotnik and Oakes, 1986). Such conflicts of interest reflect historical power structures of the society that penetrate the school. The critical paradigm can be used to expose coercion and power relationships in school organizations. In the speech "Community of the School," of the use of power distorts communication and prevents dialogue (Retallick, 1989). Bates

(1985) warns of the manipulative use of culture in business organizations. The management literature has led to a focus on the shaping of a strong `corporate culture.' (See Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Here leaders reduced opportunities for participants so as to promote particular organizational purposes. In this paradigm, successful leaders are those who impose their own values and perspectives on others.

Critical theory goes beyond the scientific management and also the interpretive paradigms in that there is a concern for social justice in both the school and society. Education becomes a social and moral activity in which learners should have opportunities to participate in a fair society. In this view, school is a place where both learners and professionals should gain greater control over their lives. Critical theorists are not accepting of existing social arrangements in either school or society as there are elements of social life that limit the opportunities of at least some learners. They have a predisposition to recognize and critique educational ideologies that serve the interests of specific groups, especially if there is evidence of domination of others (Kemmis, 1985, p. 42). Educators should be prepared to scrutinize both instructional and administrative arrangements in the school. Critical practitioners are prepared to direct effort toward reforms that lead to better education or to an improvement in the social conditions of learners. Practitioners who are guided by critical theory have a motivation to bring about change in education. Working for change requires courage, judgment, and persistence on the part of educational leaders.

Using the interpretive and critical paradigms, the new principal should give special attention to identifying the key values, beliefs, and assumptions that underpin the shared meanings that influence the actions of school participants. Judgment should be made about the extent to which the shared meanings either enhance or limit the learning of all categories of students. In addition, there should be concern for identifying the shared meanings that are contested within the school community and of the `frontiers of influence' of the competing interest groups. It is possible that some shared meanings that are incorporated in policy and practice have a hegemonic function and serve to disable certain categories of teachers, students, or parents. The critical perspective enables the new principal to penetrate the taken-for-granted reality of the social world of school participants. The professional orientation of the new principal should be focused on the renovation of the culture of the school using a collaborative process that involves school participants. Renovation of the culture of the school to empower new categories of teachers, students, and parents is a value-laden activity. If the new principal is to negotiate the culture of the school, then the appointee will be required to have a high degree of communicative competence. The new principal will attempt to create an on-going discourse

where shared meanings are legitimized or, if problematic, are progressively subjected to critical scrutiny in the decision-making forums of the school.

Critical theory offers a practical form of reasoning that can be used by the new principal to guide purposeful action leading to change in the culture of the school. Praxis refers to the integration of personal theories and strategies for action. Praxis occurs when the conditions that guided previous action are reviewed using both the action and the professional knowledge that informed the action. (See Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 33). The on-going dialect of theory and action to remove contradictions requires the questioning of both theories in use as well as preferences for action in the context of the culture of the school. Through reflection and constructive thinking, new purposeful action can be taken to create the necessary conditions for change to the culture of the school.

A variety of competing concepts of culture are now available to new principals who choose to work with culture. New principals should understand the possible outcomes when choosing a concept of culture to guide practice. In this paper, a conceptualization has been proposed that orients the new principal toward educational reform during the first year of appointment. Although this orientation makes even more demanding what is a difficult career transition, the proposal has potential to empower school participants to become involved in school-level change.

Strategy For The Negotiation Of Culture

If the new principal is to provide leadership that is grounded in the culture of the school, then a general strategy is required for the negotiation of culture. Applying the critical perspective, the new principal requires capacity to 'read' the sets of meanings that comprise the culture of the school. The new principal should be active in identifying the components of the constellation of shared meanings that promote worthwhile learning for all categories of students. If the interests of all groups are to be advanced in decision-making forums, then dialogue is needed between school participants. The new principal should work toward establishing authentic rather than distorted communication among the competing interest groups (Retallick, 1989). Critical scrutiny of culture requires the development of a collaborative process from which the purposes of the school can be identified. Here the new principal attempts to establish a learning community. School participants are encouraged to develop collaborative arrangements that improve their sense of control over their work.

A three-part strategy is now proposed to guide the administrative action and theory building of the new principal during the first year of appointment. The strategy assumes that the new principal has a conceptualization of culture that is informed by interpretive and critical paradigms. The new principal should assess the significance of culture for understanding organizational behavior and to inform administrative praxis. The new principal should be able to:

- devise strategies to discover, describe, conceptualize, and explain the existing culture of the school;
- plan a collaborative process for the critical review and the transformation of existing culture; and
- communicate a shared purpose that is grounded in the culture of the school, so as to promote student learning.

The above represents an iterative rather than a linear strategy. New principals may choose to act on the most problematic aspects of any culture, before attempting to understand all facets of the cultural constellation. Also, on-going culture formation will necessitate that the new principal is required to discover new meanings during the course of the school year.

The capacity of the new principal to negotiate the culture of the school is dependent upon the progressive development and linkage of three domains of knowledge and practice. First, there is a need to acquire a detailed working knowledge of school operations during the cycle of the school year. This includes knowledge of school policy, procedures, and the practices of school participants. Second, the principal should develop a network of influence for the receipt of information about the current flux of meanings as well as for the transmission of personal definitions of the situation. Here the new principal must come to know the characteristics of other people in the school community and have an awareness of his or her own contribution to culture formation.. Third, the new principal has to work at the translation of a preferred administrative style into a practical performance to establish working relationships with other school participants. The new principal should have an awareness of the extent to which his or her own personal values about education mesh with the expectations of other school participants. Collectively these domains of knowledge and practice enable the principal to participate in culture formation. The presence of the new principal also influences the way other school participants negotiate meaning.

In the Western Australian study, the new principals differed in their level of awareness of the significance of culture for understanding organizational behavior. Some of the limitations that were evident in their strategies for the negotiation of culture are now considered.

On receiving appointments, the principals designate commenced to build a picture of the characteristics of the school. The appointees varied in the extent to which they focused on what Firestone and Wilson (1987) describe as bureaucratic and cultural linkages of the school. The former refers to the formal arrangements in a school that organize behavior such as rules, procedures, and authority relations. By comparison, the latter refers to the set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and values that organize the daily actions of school participants. There were differences among the principals in the degree to which administration centered on policies, procedures, and practices or on accommodating the perspectives of people. It was concluded that new principals were characterized by either a closed or a partial or an open context of awareness of the significance of culture as a phenomenon that influenced the actions of school participants.

Closer examination of the new principals who had a partial or an open awareness context of the significance of shared meanings suggested two orientations toward the exploration of the culture Some principals displayed an intuitive orientation. Over time, extensive contact with other school participants enabled these principals to come to understand the context and the form of expression for shared meanings in the school. These principals were 'surface learners' who eventually became immersed in the culture of the school. Through an uncontrolled trial and error, they would acquire a sense of the unique cultural constellation of the school. By comparison, other new principals demonstrated a more active orientation to the exploration of the culture of the school. There was a high level of awareness of their own process of 'sense-making.' Here there was an attempt to systematically identify the beliefs, assumptions, and the values that underpinned the perspectives of school participants. These principals analyzed and reflected upon school incidents and practices. Attention was given to explaining the relationships between groups of school participants and the way in which power and contestation influenced communication. The principals developed questions or even hypotheses and sought information to confirm emerging conceptualizations of the dynamics of culture formation. This included the testing of the conceptualizations of other important participants in the school community. These principals made a consistent effort to 'get below the surface' of the shared meanings.

It is to be expected that new principals who use an analytic rather than an intuitive orientation to explore culture will more quickly come to understand the linkages that exist among the phenomena of the school. The critical paradigm provides an important body of professional knowledge for the exploration, analysis, and evaluation of the culture of the school. Some new principals have acquired elements of a critical theory view of the school independent of formal professional development programs. By comparison, most new principals in the study relied upon intuition. Their goal was the development of supportive relationships with colleagues. In Western Australia, anecdotal evidence about the folklore of the principalship suggests that it may take up to three years before a new principal comes to understand the 'deep structure' of the school. In the turbulent world of education, all new principals require theoretical frameworks and practice that enable rapid exploration of the culture of the school.

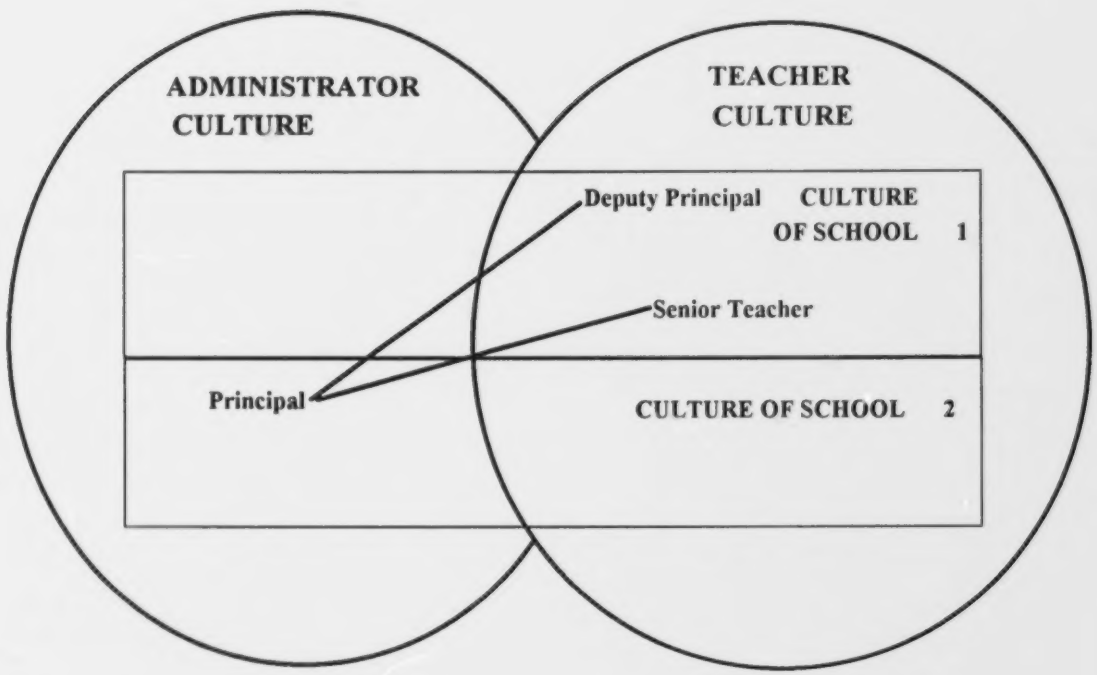
One of the typical errors of judgment that was observed in the field study was that new principals often developed administrative responses to problems according to solutions that had worked in their previous school of appointment. There was a lack of appreciation of the uniqueness of the cultural meanings that underpinned the bureaucratic linkages of the school. In the school of appointment, the best solution to a problem may not be the one that was used by the new principal in a previous school. Through reflection, past experience can be applied to unfamiliar situations. Schon's (1983) conceptualization of the `reflective practitioner' indicates the mode of inquiry that is required of new principals who systematically explore the culture of the school. Reflection enables distinction to be made as to how present situations and problems are both similar to and different from previous situations and problems.

Taking up the first principalship is a demanding career transition. Typically the transition involves emergency professional development (Harvey, 1988). Appointees bring a preferred administrative style to their initial principalship. Appointees must rapidly acquire the mindset and the skills of the administrator. The appointee must leave the social world of the teacher and enter the social world of the administrator. At the same time, the appointee must develop conceptions of administration and teaching that are grounded in the culture of the school of appointment, rather than that of the previous school. Such a perspective does not preclude change, but it does recognize the existing material and social circumstances of the school of appointment as a starting point for any change process. Principals designate require knowledge of the boundaries of the cultural constellations that they will traverse during their career transition. Figure 1 shows the role and culture transitions that are undertaken by the new

principal. These role and culture transitions are not necessarily synchronized with the commencement of the first year of appointment as principal. If the new principal is prepared to engage in praxis, then this should enable greater focus on negotiating the culture of the school on taking up appointment.

Figure 1

Role and Culture Transitions of the New Principal



Some issues relating to the way new principals should assess the significance of culture have been identified. New principals should:

- develop an awareness of the significance of the cultural as well as the bureaucratic linkages in the social organization of the school, i.e. assess the way in which shared meanings are related to the structural characteristics of schools;

- develop an analytic rather than an intuitive orientation to the exploration of culture, i.e. emphasis on a systematic search for the beliefs, assumptions, and values that underpin organizational behavior;

- recognize the way in which the culture of the school of appointment has characteristics that differ from the culture of the previous school, i.e. search for the unique and special characteristics of the culture;

- be a reflective practitioner. Use knowledge about the culture of the school to develop preferences for an administrative style;

- have awareness of the extent to which their preferred administrative style on entry to the school is grounded in the culture of a previous school; and

- recognize the transition in their professional perspective from a culture of teaching to a culture of administration. Entry into the social world of the administrator makes more difficult an awareness of the perspectives of teachers.

The components of the general strategy are now reviewed.

Devising Strategies To Discover, Describe, Conceptualize, and Explain The Existing Culture of The School

New principals must 'read' the culture of the school in order to make sense of their experience. Similarly it becomes important to recognize that other school participants make sense of the actions of the new principal using the lens of culture. Through social interaction, the new principal intentionally or unintentionally contributes to culture formation. From the time of taking up appointment as chief executive officer, the new principal is called upon to approve ongoing school activities. Here a paradoxical situation emerges from the succession to the

principalship. As an outsider who lacks understanding of an historical culture, the principal will be called upon to legitimize current meanings. This includes the arbitration of disputes as to what counts as 'good' practice and `appropriate' policy in the school of appointment. Negotiating the culture of the school is a process of reading, communicating, and legitimizing shared meanings.

Success in negotiating culture depends upon the effectiveness of the social network that the appointee establishes as principal designate and as principal. The network should be progressively constructed to deliver information about school operations and for the spread of influence. The establishment of the network will take considerable time and energy. Priority should be given to establishing dialogue with other school participants. The principal must acquire both artistry and judgment in using the network. Much trial and error is required before the network can be used to harvest the feelings and the professional concerns of colleagues and other members of the school community.

The network is not only a conduit for communication, but is also a pattern of power relationships. As a participant in the social network, the principal occupies a niche in the micropolitics of the school. The network of the new principal is an 'accomplishment.' It reflects the degree of credibility that is attributed to the new principal by other school participants. An effective network provides the principal with capacity to discover, describe, conceptualize, and explain the existing culture of the school. At the commencement of the school year, there are a number of factors that limit the effectiveness of the network to deliver telling information about the interaction of the new principal and school culture. These difficulties are now described.

In the field study, news of the appointment of a new principal tended to influence discourse within a school. Fragments of the appointee's background and reputation were used by members of the school community to make predictions about the consequences of the appointment for the coming school year. Teachers and parents tended to focus on how characteristics that were attributed to the principal designate will translate into an administrative style. The members of the school community took note of background characteristics such as age, gender (especially if a female), the categories of schools in which the appointee had served, as well as the ethos or public image of these schools. Reputational characteristics such as 'innovativeness,' 'ability to make decisions,' 'support for student discipline policy,' and a 'concern for equal opportunity' were noted by the teachers of the school of appointment. In the culture of some schools, ethnocentric themes made difficult a perceptual

matching of the new principal and the culture of the school. Judgments were made using the public characteristics of the appointees. Principals designate can acquire a spoiled identity or a stigma. It becomes important that the new principal does not confirm any negative expectations during the first phase of contact with school participants.

New principals typically demonstrated a high level of motivation and wish to 'get the school off to a good start' at the commencement of the school year. There was an awareness of the high expectations that were held for their performance. At initial meetings with staff and parents, the principals gave priority to some of the universal themes of administrator culture, such as the need for 'collaborative relationships among professionals' and 'an open door policy for decision making.' However most staff suspended their judgment. They were aware of the executive power of the principal, especially as this applies to the supervision and the evaluation of teachers. At this stage, the personal values of the principal had not been consistently demonstrated. Much of the principal's work was 'invisible' to school staff. Most teachers only had a limited awareness of the tasks of school administration. In the first weeks of the school year, respect for the new principal centered on the authority of the position rather than from actions that contributed to the strengthening of the existing culture. At this stage, school staff may be reluctant to engage in authentic communication with the principal. Beneath the veneer of cooperation with the new principal, there was a reluctance to disclose one's own beliefs and expectations.

The 'start-up' phase of the school year is a demanding experience for a new principal who had not yet developed and refined a practical administrative performance. The new principals were overwhelmed by the breaking waves of administrative demands during the first month of the school year. They experienced an information overload and could not manage their available time. Many expressed a preference for a 'hands-on approach' so that they were seen to be contributing to school activities. Paradoxically, during this period of acute work overload, there was reluctance delegate (Weindling & Early, 1987a; Harvey, 1988). Some would not let go of the administrative tasks from the previous school in which they had demonstrated competence. Others were motivated by a concern not to overload colleagues with work. In this period of work overload, one coping strategy was to reduce contacts with teachers and students in order to make time for the more important administrative tasks. The pressure to make many decisions without having a coherent view of the complex expectations and procedures for the school contributed to a lowering of the morale of the new principals.

Teachers tended to expect that the new principal would make changes. Most new principals confirmed that belief. Teachers could cite examples of where the rhetoric of collaborative decision making had been replaced by unilateral decision making. Typically the new principals made adjustments to the channels of communication and the broadness or narrowness of representation in committees and other decision-making forums. In some cases, action to remedy these perceived problems generated a negative response from certain interest groups. The new principals did not reflect on the possible effects of the changes, or simply could not 'read' the culture of the school to predict the responses of various groups. The way in which the existing culture of the school provided school participants with a sense of security was underestimated by new principals.

During this period of intense workload, many principals drifted into a niche of professional and even social isolation in the social network of the school. In the first school term, many of the new principals were seen by continuing staff as using the discretionary power of the position, backing away from the open door policy and narrowing their contact with a broad range of school participants. Under these circumstances, teachers were not forthcoming with honest and open feedback. Some principals were unsure as to whether they could accept teacher feedback at face value. The new principals lacked an intimate knowledge of the characteristics of particular teachers. This further reduced the accuracy of interpreting the response of teachers to influence by the principal. Similarly teachers required time in order to make sense of the principal's actions during this period of reactive management. The unwillingness of teachers to seek a more informal relationship reflected the presence of separate teacher and administrator cultures.

This complex of phenomena created difficulties for the new principal in reading the culture of the school. Not only is the principal deprived of contacts with people, but power differences meant that subordinates acted as diplomats and did not reveal authentic perspectives. When this occurs, the new principal harvests distorted rather than authentic meanings from the network of influence.

At the start of the school term, the basis of respect by the teacher for the principal was the authority of the position. It was not until the latter part of first term that teachers were able to assess the performance of the new principal. By then the principal had demonstrated a repertoire of personal values, administrative knowledge, and skills. The disclosure of personal values about education enabled the basis of teacher respect for the principal to shift away from the authority of the position toward meanings that had been negotiated in collaborative

activities. At this stage, the teachers become less guarded if they could see that the new administrative style legitimized the shared meanings of their own interest groups.

When the basis of respect for the principal changed to the recognition of personal and professional values, knowledge, and skills, then dialogue became more likely. Authentic communication enabled the principal to push back the frontier of the network of influence. The attainment of a critical mass of credibility in the micropolitics of the school enabled the new principal to penetrate new forums of culture formation in the school.

In establishing an effective network of influence, new principals face some important choices. Within the school community, there are people who function as the 'bearers of the tradition' or the 'wise old men of the tribe.' These individuals embody the collective wisdom of previous problem solving. They may also serve as the guardians or 'gatekeepers' of key elements of school organization. New members are encouraged to learn the correct ways to think, perceive, and feel in relation to these problems. The culture of the school contains an accumulation of problems and proven solutions. New principals may come under pressure to be accepting of the existing constellation of meanings.

Discovery of the beliefs, assumptions, and values in the fabric of the culture of the school at the beginning of the school year can create a dilemma for the new principal. Disclosure of personal concerns about school practices and policies may lead to a loss of support before effective working relationships with the continuing staff can be established. The principal must decide whether to confront the problematic practice or to table a concern for later action (O'Callaghan, 1990, p. 5). Another strategy of new principals that was observed in the field study was that of strategic suspension. Here the concern would not be made known until more secure relationships had been established.

The relationships of the new principal to the deputy principal(s) and other senior staff cannot be taken for granted. Senior staff who will continue in the school are likely to be the 'guardians' of what Corbett, Firestone and Wilson (1987) identified as the sacred elements of culture. Weindling and Earley (1987a) highlighted the problematic nature of the working relationship of the heads and deputy heads. In the three secondary schools of the Western Australian study, each new principal struggled to establish a moral ascendancy over one or more deputy principals or senior staff or teachers or parents. Only when the new principal challenged these gatekeepers and demonstrated capacity to make decisions that were perceived as emphasizing the purpose of the school did they legitimize culture. In the presence of 'guardians' of the

sacred elements of culture, the new principal should choose carefully the moment at which to publicly demonstrate capacity to independently judge what perspectives and behaviors are appropriate in the school.

The image of the outgoing principal may create problems for the new principal in negotiating the culture of the school. The power that resides in the position of principal means that occupants of the position have opportunities to become major contributors to culture formation or even culture management. Principals can become the founders or sponsors of particular cultural themes that become taken for granted by school participants. In a theoretical treatment, Deal (1987, p. 6) points to the possible sense of loss by members of a school community with the appointment of a new principal. Empirical studies by Weindling and Early (1987b) and Hart (1988) found evidence of the phenomenon of loss. In three of the schools of the Western Australian study, a clear sense of loss was displayed by some members of the school community. The outgoing principals had generated public endorsement of their administrative style and were successful in the management of culture. All new principals should analyze the role of the outgoing principal in the process of culture formation. This is especially so if the outgoing principal has been active in either the manipulation or the building of an ethnocentric culture.

From the start of the school year, the flow of school activities throws up situations where the new principal must pass judgment as to what constitutes the culture of the school. Despite limited knowledge of the history of customized decision making and of how things are done, new principals are required to legitimize key perspectives and behaviors. Usually these situations arise from conflict between school participants. Failure to take action to dampen conflict in the school can damage the credibility of the new principal. Use of 'readers' of the culture is a strategy that enables the new principal to understand what is expected by continuing staff. However this strategy results in dependence upon the readers and perhaps the conversion of the new principal to the existing culture of the school. At some stage, it becomes important for the new principal to challenge the moral ascendancy of other bearers of the tradition and to demonstrate independent capacity to read culture and to predict the values that will finally prevail. This action becomes necessary when school participants face situations for which there are no prescribed solutions in the culture or where the culture sanctions an inappropriate response.

Some of the difficulties that new principals experienced in attempting to 'read' the culture of the school have now been identified. The establishment of a network of influence through which

dialogue with a range of school participants is possible enables the new principal to discover, describe, and conceptualize the culture of the school and to develop a personal view of the purpose of the school. The new principal should become aware of the meta-values that underpin significant areas of school activity. Judgment should be made as to which sets of meanings either facilitate or create barriers for student learning. The development of a set of administrative priorities is central to the new principal moving beyond the stage of reactive management and non-cumulative decision-making (Harvey, 1988). To assist in their positioning to 'read' culture, new principals should:

- establish a network of communication in order to obtain access to authentic meanings from the various interest groups of the school;

- locate and then devise strategies to gain access to the main forums of culture formation. The new principal should give attention to extending the frontier of influence in the micropolitics of the school;

- use 'readers' of the culture as a temporary strategy to help overcome difficulties in understanding the expectations of school participants;

- acquire capacity to diagnose culture rather than remain dependent upon the 'readers' and especially the 'guardians' of the culture;

- take action to avoid a prolonged period of reactive management that may lead to professional and social isolation at the start of the school year. In these circumstances the network does not yield significant information about school activities;

- use judgment in deciding when to question key meanings that are considered to present barriers for student learning;

- recognize the effects of the preferred administrative style on the culture of the school, i.e. directing and controlling school activities has greater potential to disturb the culture of the school than the facilitation of school participants to take ownership of initiatives;

- be aware of how the negotiation of culture influences personal credibility in the micropolitics of the school. Challenge to the 'guardians' of the culture is a moment of risk that passes only when the new principal demonstrates capacity to predict the responses of school participants;

- critically analyze the role of the outgoing principal in the process of culture formation;

- develop artistry and judgment in using the network of communication so as to promote undistorted communication. The new principal must gain confidence in reading the culture of the school if positioning for leadership is to result;

- through reflection develop a framework for describing and conceptualizing the culture of school, i.e. link behavior, perspectives, and meta-values. This schema should be revised with further experience; and

- assess the extent to which the main sets of meanings contribute to the satisfaction of the educational needs of each category of students.

Plan A Collaborative Process For The Critical Review and The Transformation of Existing Culture

According to critical theory, the new principal should accept responsibility for establishing and maintaining a process whereby school participants collectively scrutinize the beliefs, assumptions, and values of the culture of the school together with the attendant policies and practices. Action research is a collaborative activity that has potential to promote change using the creative endeavor of school staff. Action research centers on systematic cycles of observation, planning, implementation, and review. In the critical theory paradigm, action research is strategic action to improve not only the practice, but also the level of understanding of the participants of the situation in which they work (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 165). The establishment of an action research cycle has potential to establish a collaborative process for the renovation and transformation of culture. A cycle of critical inquiry such as that proposed by Sirotnik and Clark (1988, p. 662) would serve this end. The process includes:

- understanding the problem. What are we doing now? How did it come to be that way?;

- understanding the values affected by the problem. Whose interests are being served by the way things are?;

- seeking information. What information and knowledge do we have (or need to get) that bears on the issues? (Get it and continue the discourse.); and

- taking action; is this the way we want things to be? What are we going to do about all of this? (Get on with it.)

In this framework, the focus of the principal is on problem seeking as well as problem solving. Ideally, even the sacred elements of culture are not above scrutiny. Such a process should start on a small scale and be gradually increased in scope.

The restructuring of education systems has seen the emergence of 'self managing' schools. A central feature of this school is a collaborative cycle of planning, implementation, and review. In an authentic self-managing school, there is a capacity to respond to change. School staff have a responsibility to review instructional practices and the organization of the school. Self-management includes a willingness to critically examine problematic aspects of school operations, and if necessary, to undertake radical reorganization. Evers (1990) has termed this capacity for reconstruction or error correction as organizational learning. The cultivation of a constructive critique from within the school is central not only to the operation of a self-managing school, but also to the renovation of culture. In the self-managing school, there may be a considerable infrastructure to sustain collaborative review of school operations, and hence the culture of the school. The new principal should also monitor the cyclical planning, implementation, and review activities to assess the extent to which this represents a contrived rather than an authentic collegiality. (See Grimmett, 1990.)

In some ways it would appear that a new principal is well-placed to accept responsibility to provide leadership for the critical review of the culture of the school. As a practitioner whose recent theories of teaching and school organization are grounded in experience from other schools, there should be no irreversible commitment to the customized beliefs, assumptions, and values of the host school. In school systems that prescribe school development or school improvement or school-based management, the new principal has a mandate to strengthen program evaluation. Also, many new principals will take up appointments in schools where there are significant local opportunities for collaboration in the review of school activities. This may be associated with staff dissatisfaction about some of the policies and practices that were

established during the period of the previous principal. The simultaneous arrival of a significant number of new staff or new parent representatives who also have not yet developed a commitment to the sacred elements of the culture can also create a momentum for change.

Closer analysis of the phenomenon of culture shows that both new and experienced principals face significant difficulties in establishing collaborative processes of school-based management for the critical review of school activities. Long ago, Sarason (1971) argued that the culture of the school acts as a barrier to school improvement. Culture functions as a conservative force that maintains the school in its current form. Culture limits the capacity of all participants to develop a view of what is possible and to allow consideration of alternatives. Sirotnik and Oakes (1986, pp. 16-17) make the observation that there are no mechanisms in schools to discuss belief systems, and to use the outcomes for purposes of cultural renovation. Culture saturates the belief systems of school participants with an unquestioning acceptance of `what is.' Consequently, change efforts typically fail to question what is taken for granted and are usually in the direction of trying to further improve or refine current activities. Culture assumes an 'adversarial role in fundamental change efforts' (Sirotnik & Oakes, 1986, p. 16). Culture represents the collective wisdom of past problem solving. Therefore, the solutions should '... be taught to new members as the correct way to think, perceive, and feel in relation to those problems' (Schein 1985, p. 9). Continuing staff and parents expect new principals to undergo 'conversion' to existing practices. Resistance will be forthcoming to new principals and other external agents who threaten the 'natural order' of the school.

In the Western Australian study, each of the new principals believed that during the first year of appointment they had worked collaboratively with school staff and parents to review school activities and to clarify the purposes of the school. To the researcher, most of the new principals overestimated their success in establishing a collaborative planning processes. Only two of the new principals were successful in undertaking a critical review of existing school activities and, hence, culture. The outcomes were due not only to the demonstrated administrative style and capacity for communication, but also the distinctive micropolitical milieu of the school.

Some principals attempted to make the school more harmonious and compromising and underwent conversion to the meta-values of the indigenous culture of the school. The sacred elements of the cultures of these schools were preserved. Other principals made a sustained attempt to establish a collective process to review the success of current school operations. However, they lacked sufficient political power to obtain the on-going support from the

competing interest groups to review school operations. These principals were not successful in focusing the attention of school staff on school improvement activities. There was resistance to responsible participation in meetings that scrutinized existing school activities. The business of everyday life in the school, together with policy turbulence in the school system made difficult the focusing of the attention of school staff on a specific activity over a long period of time. Much of the impact of new principals on the culture of the school during the first year of appointment was unplanned. Some principals did challenge practices that they saw as inappropriate. Their pursuit of policies did not have the support of all sections of school staff.

When new principals displayed a critical-analytic or problem-seeking orientation to the culture of the school, the following meanings were communicated to school participants:

- the purpose of the school is not clear. There is a need to gain a shared view of the future direction of the school;
- the school can be improved. What kind of place should the school become?;
- meetings are important forums where school participants have a responsibility to identify problems and to contribute to problem solving; and
- teaching staff and parents should have opportunities to plan, implement, and review programs.

The meanings encouraged school participants to be reflective and to scrutinize some aspects of school operations. The collection and interpretation of data concerning the effectiveness of current school practices was a key strategy to arouse staff motivation for change. The principals used judgment to ensure that school participants did not become overwhelmed by the scope of any change initiative. If too many aspects of current school operations were exposed to scrutiny, then it was possible that too much collective effort would be diverted away from the delivery of the teaching-learning program. Some elements of the inherited culture were legitimized in order to provide school participants with a sense of purpose and security.

In establishing these meanings, the new principals were changing the culture of the school. Their efforts incorporated much of what Saphier and King (1986) describe as the norms of a

culture that sustain school improvement. Duignan (1987, p. 211) has collapsed this theoretical treatment of culture into four components:

- collegiality--There must be a climate of trust and openness in which professional colleagues feel comfortable in working closely with each other;
- experimentation--Teachers, especially, must be encouraged to reflect on their practice and experiment with new ways of teaching;
- involvement--Structures must be shaped so that those affected by decisions are involved in making them; and
- high expectations--There are high expectations for students, for teachers, and for leaders.

New principals can work toward the renovation of the existing constellation of shared meanings to establish a more collaborative culture during the first year of appointment.

The above discussion has implications for the way in which new principals should establish a process of critical review for the transformation of culture. The new principal should:

- encourage school participants to improve their awareness and understanding of the beliefs, assumption, and values that influence school activities;
- recognize the conservative function of school culture in relation to any systematic change process. Culture provides emotional security for school participants. Where possible, the new principal should highlight the importance of elements of the existing culture of the school that enhance the teaching-learning process;
- exercise judgment in broadening the scope and the number of people who are involved in collaborative inquiry. New principals should ensure that the scope of collaborative inquiry does not divert energy away from the delivery of the existing program;
- recognize that many school participants will resist participation in a collaborative inquiry unless they are confronted by information that reveals the limitations or shortcomings of current school activities; and

- attempt to establish a collaborative culture of critical inquiry in order to evaluate school activities and to promote organizational learning.

Communicate A Shared Purpose That Is Grounded In The Culture Of The School So As To Promote Student Learning

School participants expect new principals to demonstrate leadership to the same degree as experienced principals. In the critical perspective, leadership centers on the generation of a dialogue where competing groups and individuals identify the problems confronting student learning and debate the purpose of the school. The new principal should work with other leaders in the school to establish conditions that enable undistorted communication. Hierarchical power must be removed from the forums of discussion if evidence and argument is to be used to negotiate genuine consensus. The leader(s) facilitate the negotiation of meanings that makes clear the purpose and priorities of the school and of the contribution of school participants. Participation in the dialogue generates a commitment by teachers and parents to school priorities.

Leadership is required to promote a culture of critical inquiry. Here the new principal must learn not to use the authority of the position to influence decision making about school purposes. The new principal should not use the power methods that are typical of political struggle in organizations. Instead, the new principal should encourage school participants beyond the frontier of influence to join the debate. Knight's (1988, p. 18) concept of principled negotiation is appropriate. This 'no lose' method of conflict resolution includes:

- informing the opponent of the conflict and be sure there is sufficient time to explore it fully;
- jointly defining the conflict as a problem to be solved rather than a result of personality characteristics;
- communicating both opinions and emotions, and the desire to resolve the situation;
- being empathetic;
- showing good faith and receive good faith; and

- pursuing the matter to a solution.

Here the principal assists the new participants in the debate to understand the rules of debate so as to ensure that their views have maximum effect. The facilitation of a collaborative, collegial, critical administrative culture will be difficult for new principals whose formative experience took place in a hierarchical, bureaucratic, manipulative administrative culture. By resorting to openness, the new principal can acquire the critical mass of credibility that is needed to become a key artisan who frames the culture of the school.

Most of the new principals displayed leadership styles that centered on the use of hierarchical power. This style distorted communication and produced a false consensus. In an extreme form corresponded to what Hoyle (1986) has termed 'heroic leadership.' Here the principal 'leads from the front' and becomes the source and owner of the major purposes and policies of the school. Other principals were able to have their preferences accepted in decision-making forums. These principals acted to shape the constellation of shared meanings according to their own purposes. Few of the new principals were willing to let go of the supervision of debates about the purpose of the school that had implications for policy making. By using power to constrain dialogue, then opportunities were lost to understand the perspectives and the meanings of others and to obtain their commitment to a problem-solving strategy. Collecting information is critical to organizational problem solving. The capacity of school staff to learn about the organizational dynamics of the school is central to planning for school improvement.

Murphy (1988, p. 655) recognized the need for principals to give attention to the 'unheroic' side of leadership. This included:

- developing a shared vision (as well as defining a personal vision);
- asking questions (as well as having answers);
- coping with weakness (as well as displaying strength);
- listening and acknowledging (as well as talking and persuading);
- depending upon others (as well as exercising power); and
- letting go (as well as taking charge).

These important behind-the-scenes activities enhance the potential for leadership. In order to demonstrate leadership, the new principal should attempt to develop a view of the future of the school. It was found that the period of reactive management and non-cumulative decision making was due in part to the inability of the appointee to comprehend the purpose of the school. Eventually the new principal obtains sufficient information to develop a personal vision of the school. A significant issue in leadership theory is whether the new principal will try to convert other school participants to this view, or whether the principal's view will be tabled in the forums of the school with the perspectives of other school participants. This is a choice that indicates the new principal's preference for either a hierarchical, bureaucratic, manipulative culture or a collaborative, critical, collegial administrative culture. The nature of the administrative culture in the school must also be the subject of review.

The 'management best-sellers' of the early eighties recognized the responsibility of the chief executive officer for enhancing the motivation of staff through the design of corporate culture. (See Ouichi 1981; Peters & Waterman 1982; Deal & Kennedy, 1982.) In other works, the function of corporate leadership was to be 'a social architect' (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 110) or to 'create culture' or to engage in 'the manipulation of culture' (Schein, 1985, p. 317). Here leaders positioned themselves to modify elements of corporate culture that reduce the intrinsic motivation of the lower participants.

> In a growing organization the leadership externalizes its own assumptions and embeds them gradually and consistently in the mission, goals, structures and working procedures of the group.
>
> ... the leader needs both vision and the ability to articulate it (culture) and to enforce it (culture) (Schein, 1985, p. 317).

There is now a substantial critique of the 'manipulative management' approach to the building of corporate culture. (See Bates 1986; Foster 1986; Mumbry, 1988.) Chief executive officers may prefer to build efficient management practices around hierarchical power structures rather than the interests of the workers or clients. In schools, the needs of students should be the focus of policy and practice. The culture of the school should not become a manipulative control device to make school staff and parents more manageable. Critical scrutiny of the culture of the school is a necessary task for the new principal. The appointee should attempt to 'spark,' 'spin,' and 'weave' a set of meanings that empowers teachers and recognizes the interests of all student groups.

Perspectives about of the future of the school should be grounded in the culture of the school. Failure to link the present and the future will not motivate school participants to achieve that future. In one primary school with a high proportion of educationally disadvantaged students, the new principal communicated a fresh and positive view of the future of the school. The initial response of the staff was one of curiosity and interest. Eventually the innovative view of the school that was promoted by the principal could no longer be accepted by staff. The vision was not grounded in the culture of the school. The collapse of support for this view led to reassessment of the credibility of the new principal. In cultivating influence, principals require capacity to make realistic predictions as to what can be achieved. The commitment of the teachers, like other workers, cannot be sustained over a long period of time by altruistic views that lack validity. Eventually school participants will make an assessment of the extent to which the vision is realistic or attainable. Of course, their assessment will be grounded in the existing culture of the school. A principal's view of the school is initially a source of influence. However, the collapse of this view will diminished the principal's credibility in the eyes of the staff. The revision of the status of the principal then becomes a factor that constrains further attempts by the principal to influence school participants. Such faded visions or failed missions become part of the culture of the school (Hoyle, 1986). These phenomena serve to dampen staff interest in any further change initiatives.

Other principals who attempted to articulate a vision for the school also risked going beyond the teachers' perspectives of 'what was possible.' The principals who experienced success as leaders gave attention to the identification of existing school problems and strengths before a future destination for the school was identified. In periods of policy turbulence, Murphy (1988, p. 656) does not accept that school leaders should articulate a definitive vision which is then imposed on others. Instead the vision is a general framework or 'scaffolding,' rather than a blue-print for action. The framework requires revision with further input and testing from school participants.

By the end of the first year of appointment, many new principals believe that they have made a significant contribution to shaping the values of the school. Roberts (1989) reports that there were discrepancies between the way new principals perceived their own leadership style and the way in which they were perceived by teachers. New principals who believed that they gave emphasis to values were often seen by teachers as providing only lip service to this aspect of administration. Typically the attempts by the new principal to reshape the culture of the school were superficial and largely ineffectual during the first year of appointment. In the Western Australian study, two of the ten new principals were able to establish collaborative processes

that reviewed aspects of the culture of the school. These appointees had a high level of competence in communicating with colleagues. They showed a commitment to improving education in the school.

To summarize, the new principal should demonstrate leadership through the negotiation of a shared purpose concerning the future direction of the school. If this view of the future of the school is to motivate school participants, then it must be grounded in the culture of the school. The new principal should:

- find ways to establish and to maintain a dialogue between school participants about the purpose of the school;
- resist using the power of the position to exercise influence concerning the purpose and priorities of the school. Power differences create distorted communication;
- apply strategies of principled negotiation in order to establish a critical mass of credibility in the micropolitics of the school. The principal has legitimacy to authorize culture when it is known that school interests come before sectional and individual interests;
- have capacity to distinguish between a personal vision of the future of the school and the shared vision of other school participants;
- develop an awareness of the extent to which the administrative culture of the school centers on either hierarchical, bureaucratic, manipulative or critical, collaborative, collegial; and
- articulate a view of the future of the school from the discourse, that is seen as being attainable by school participants.

Conclusion

The way in which the new principal establishes a presence in a fully operational school and attempts to provide leadership during the first year of appointment is a problematic process. The appointee enters a pre-existing constellation of socially constructed meanings that serve to anchor the behavior, perspectives, and values of school participants. Recognition of the

existence of these sets of beliefs, assumptions, and values enables the new principal to plan a strategy for entry to the school. Positioning for leadership is dependent upon the capacity of the principal to negotiate the culture of the school. This requires that the new principal becomes a participant in culture formation within the school. To negotiate culture, the new principal must first acquire capacity to 'read' the competing sets of cognitions of school participants. It is through the lens of culture that the actions of the new principal become understandable to school participants. Second, through communication with school participants the principal helps to shape the context and the meanings that influence behavior. Third, the new principal as chief executive officer must be prepared to legitimize meanings and reaffirm the key values of the culture. The negotiation of culture makes life in the school more predictable and less threatening for the new principal. However this does not mean that the principal has embraced the themes of the culture. The new principal acts as a 'double agent', working simultaneously to emphasize key meanings that promote student learning while attempting to motivate school participants to develop awareness of how other meanings create barriers to learning. Through the negotiation of culture, the new principal acquires capacity to enhance existing or to initiate new collaborative processes. This is essential if there is to be a to review of ongoing school activities and the associated beliefs, assumptions, and values.

A three-part general strategy has been proposed to enable the new principal to plan the negotiation of culture. A number of strategic issues and choices have been identified for each part of the strategy. The framework should be seen as an iterative rather than a linear strategy. In developing capacity to negotiate culture, the principal will encounter opportunities to address the issues that are identified. Through resolution of the various issues and reflection, the choices can be linked. When this occurs, the new principal has a base of professional knowledge that can be used to guide practice that is directed at demonstrating leadership. Success in negotiating the culture of the school enables the new principal to demonstrate leadership. This occurs when the new principal emphasizes the key meanings that have emerged from collaborative activities, especially if they promote student learning. Such action is an important component of instructional leadership. New principals provide transformational leadership when they can create climate within which school participants contribute to the renovation of the culture of the school. (See Bass, 1985).

The development of a network of influence through which the new principal negotiates culture is not without risks to the credibility of the appointee. In the contested milieu of the school, the new principal should attempt to create a dialogue concerning the key meanings that underpin school activities. Culture functions as a conservative phenomenon in any attempt to change

school operations. The use of power to extend the frontier of influence creates distorted communication. Here the principal does not receive authentic feedback. Similarly, school participants resist coercion. The new principal must build a critical mass of credibility in order to provide leadership. From a critical view, this requires ongoing reflection by the principal about practice that contributes to the development of a collaborative administrative culture.

The use of a strategy for negotiating the culture of the school has potential to enable the new principal to gain greater control over the development of an administrative style that is grounded in the context of the school of appointment. Sensitivity to the issues involved in negotiating culture makes succession to the principalship a less traumatic event for school participants.

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